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# Sam Gompers and the Expansion of the A.F. of L. Into Canada, 1882-1898

## Samuel Gompers et l'expansion de la FAT au Canada (1882-1898)

Robert Babcock

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### Résumé de l'article

Bien que des mouvements syndicaux nationaux se soient développés aux États-Unis et au Canada au cours des années 1880 et que la Fédération américaine du travail ait prétendu avoir compétence sur tout le continent, celle-ci et le Congrès des métiers et du travail furent des années sans avoir de contacts. Gompers ignorait à peu près complètement les travailleurs canadiens jusqu'à ce que son projet de former un rassemblement international de syndicats ait été torpillé par les socialistes d'Europe. Cette tentative n'est pas indifférente aux circonstances qui entourèrent l'intérêt croissant de Gompers pour le Canada à la fin du XIXe siècle.

Gompers arrangea un échange de délégués fraternels avec les Anglais et les Canadiens en vue de mettre sur pied une nouvelle fraternité syndicale internationale formée de syndicats de métiers. Au même moment, le Congrès des métiers et du travail, irrité d'une nouvelle loi des États-Unis touchant les travailleurs aubains, était désireux de soumettre ses doléances à Gompers. Le chef syndical américain les écouta avec sympathie et proposa de rechercher une solution par le moyen de l'échange de délégués fraternels. Le Congrès des métiers et du travail était indécis cependant, parce que bon nombre de syndiqués canadiens étaient marqués d'avoir à payer des cotisations à une organisation ouvrière américaine dont les fonds servaient en partie à faire du lobbying politique à leur détriment.

Vers la même époque, quelques groupes, à l'intérieur du Congrès des métiers et du travail, réclamaient la formation d'une centrale syndicale canadienne autonome. En 1894, un comité du congrès proposa aux délégués de reconstruire le C.M.T. sous le nom de C.M.T.C. avec pleins pouvoirs d'émettre des chartes et de s'acquitter « de toute autre obligation dévolue à une organisation nationale ». L'année suivante, cependant, les Canadiens ne firent que la moitié du chemin dans la voie vers l'autonomie en accordant au conseil exécutif du Congrès le pouvoir d'émettre des chartes, mais en se gardant de changer le nom de l'organisme et laissant libre pour le moment le champ de compétence des unions internationales. Les syndicats socialistes furent admis dans les rangs du Congrès pour en être expulsés l'année suivante.

Le débat sur l'avenir du Congrès, animé par la controverse au sujet du paiement de capitations à la Fédération américaine du travail, rebondit avec une vigueur nouvelle en 1897. Le temps est arrivé déclara le délégué Hay en pleine séance du congrès, où les syndicats ouvriers canadiens doivent prendre un caractère national. Il est illogique pour des travailleurs qui estiment que le drapeau national doit flotter au toit des écoles publiques de reconnaître la suprématie des syndicats internationaux sur les syndicats nationaux. D'autres délégués se portèrent à la défense des syndicats internationaux en mettant de l'avant des cas précis où ceux-ci avaient fourni des fonds pour appuyer des grèves de leurs sections locales au Canada. Les votes de ces derniers suffirent à faire battre les partisans d'une « fédération canadienne du travail », mais les problèmes fondamentaux qu'affrontait le Congrès des métiers et du travail demeuraient sans solution. Les chefs ouvriers canadiens ne savaient pas trop où s'adresser pour obtenir l'argent nécessaire pour stimuler l'organisation et faire face aux autres activités syndicales.

Lorsque Gompers engagea P. J. Loughrin, de Sault Ste-Marie, pour entreprendre une campagne d'organisation, il sembla pendant un certain temps que la Fédération américaine du travail allait se porter à l'aide des Canadiens. Mais Loughrin fit faux bond et se lança dans une campagne contre les investissements américains dans les ressources naturelles du Canada. Il fut aussitôt congédié pour ce motif par la Fédération américaine du travail. Lorsque, par la suite, il tenta de passer au Congrès, celui-ci s'avéra trop faible pour prêter une main secourable aux tâches immenses d'organisation. N'ayant pas reçu de nouvelles des Canadiens au sujet de l'échange de délégués fraternels, Gompers décida, à la fin de 1897, d'envoyer quelqu'un de la Fédération américaine du travail, en l'occurrence Thomas Kidd, à la session suivante du Congrès des métiers et du travail. Cependant, avant la réunion, le secrétaire du Congrès, George Dower, s'entendit avec Gompers sur le versement d'un octroi annuel de cent dollars en retour de la part des cotisations des syndiqués canadiens aux syndicats internationaux qui était dépensée à des fins de lobbying politique aux États-Unis. Kidd vint au Canada dans l'intention de convaincre les Canadiens de la sagesse de la proposition de Dower. Les délégués au congrès facilitèrent l'alliance FAT-CMT en affirmant de façon explicite dans une déclaration de principes que le Congrès des métiers et du travail n'avait pas l'intention de s'allier aux adversaires socialistes de Gompers. L'accord fut proclamé au milieu des célébrations qui marquaient la victoire des armes américaines sur l'Espagne. Ainsi, Gompers, qui avait été impuissant à neutraliser l'influence des socialistes européens, avait au moins resserré son emprise sur les travailleurs canadiens.

Évidemment, à la fin de 1898, on pouvait déjà prévoir les décisions du congrès de Berlin (Kitchener) en 1902. Rien ne s'opposa plus à l'affermissement de l'autorité de Gompers sur les affaires syndicales au Canada. La Fédération américaine du travail porta son octroi à deux cents dollars en 1901, à trois cents dollars en 1902 et il fut fixé à cinq cents dollars après les décisions du congrès de Berlin. Gompers nomma, pour succéder à Loughrin, un autre organisateur à temps plein (John Flett) qui mit en branle une campagne d'organisation d'un bout à l'autre du Canada. La grande majorité des syndiqués canadiens se réjouirent des avantages économiques immédiats qu'ils obtinrent par leur rattachement à la Fédération américaine du travail et aux syndicats de métiers internationaux. Mais ils étaient peut-être moins conscients, ou peut-être cela ne les intéressait-ils pas, du fait que le Congrès des métiers et du travail se trouvait ainsi ramené au rang d'une fédération du travail d'État outre-frontière.

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# Sam Gompers and the Expansion of the A.F. of L. into Canada, 1882-1898

Robert Babcock

*In the 1890's Gompers began dreaming of an international federation of labor, and became increasingly anxious to assert hegemony over organized labor in Canada. At the same time, some Canadians hoped to transform the Trades Congress into a Canadian federation of labor which would doubtless absorb, in time, the international union locals in Canada. Largely because Trades Congress leaders felt compelled to rely upon the Federation for funds and organizers, a C. F. of L. never came to pass, and Gompers was free to pursue his continentalist designs. The famous Berlin decisions of 1902 were rather clearly foreshadowed by the end of 1898.*

Although American trade unions had been enrolling Canadian workers during the latter half of the 19th century, international unionism was by no means dominant in Canada. For many years the American Federation of Labor (A. F. of L.) claimed jurisdiction over Dominion labor without having occasion to exercise its authority. During that period a potential Canadian alternative to the Federation, the Trades and Labor Congress (T. L. C.), was the sounding board for all the diverse labor groups in the Dominion, and not just the international craft locals. This essay inquires into the circumstances at the close of this period of indecision, when the A. F. of L. began an expansion into Canada which culminated in the well-known decision by the Trades and Labor Congress at Berlin, Ontario, in 1902 to expel locals unconnected with Federation affiliates (most notably, the Knights of Labor assemblies). Gompers' initial motives for corresponding with the Congress are explored, as is

BABCOCK, Robert, Assistant Professor, Department of History, Wells College, Aurora, New York.

the response by T. L. C. leaders to the dilemmas confronting Canadian trade unions in the 1890's. The choices that were made in 1897 and 1898 tightened the Federation's grip on Canadian trade unions and made it unlikely that the Trades and Labor Congress would evolve into an autonomous labor center.

From the very beginning of trade unionism in America, the close proximity of an unpatrolled boundary gave labor leaders a special interest in Canadian affairs. The convention call of the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada (F.O.O.T.L.U.), the immediate predecessor of the A. F. of L., noted in 1882 that Chinese coolies were being imported into Canada without restriction, and concluded that «... the interests of our Trades Union brethren [sic] north of the border demand that legislative work should be attended to in Ottawa as well as in Washington »<sup>1</sup> The Americans stood to benefit, of course, since many coolies were thought to be slipping across the border into the United States and competing with organized labor. Perhaps for this reason the Toronto Trades and Labor Council was invited to send delegates to the F.O.O.T.L.U. convention in Cleveland in 1882. A year later the legislative committee of the Toronto workers approved the American labor group's objectives, and urged that a delegate be sent. Apparently the Canadians could not afford it. In 1884 the Toronto Council renewed correspondence with F.O.O.T.L.U. in the hope of affiliating. Again the empty treasury in Toronto persuaded the prime mover, John D. O'Donoghue, to cease his efforts<sup>2</sup>.

During the next two years the energies of Toronto unionists seem to have been directed toward the creation of a separate Canadian national labor center. The Trades and Labor Congress emerged in 1886 (the same year that F.O.O.T.L.U. was transformed into the A. F. of L.) to represent the interests of Canadian workingmen on both the provincial and federal levels. At its first meeting, eighty delegates came from Knights of Labor groups in Canada and only about eight were elected from locals of the international unions. The domination of Trades Congress meetings by the Knights may explain why there appears to have been no formal

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<sup>1</sup> *Trades Union Advocate*, Toronto, No. 21, September 21, 1882, p. 1. The writer is indebted to Eugene Forsey for this item.

<sup>2</sup> Minutes of the Toronto Trades and Labor Council, January 6, September 15, 1882; February 16, June 1, July 20, August 4, December 7, 1883; July 18, August 1, September 19, 1884. PAC, Ottawa.

exchange between the American and Canadian central labor bodies during the next decade <sup>3</sup>.

#### GOMPERS CALLS FOR AN INTERNATIONAL LABOR CONGRESS

Gompers' attention was strongly focused on international labor matters, though he may have been paying little attention to Canadian labor. Three years after the A. F. of L. was founded he issued invitations to the « organized wage workers of the world » to meet at an international congress in Chicago in 1893, coincident with the World's Fair. The British Trades Union Congress responded favorably. However, when the International Socialist Congress, an organization supported by many European labor unions, refused to accept the invitation, Gompers was forced to cancel the meeting. Humiliated, he quickly blamed it on the influence of « malicious » American socialists, and thereafter drew a sharp line in his mind between socialist labor organizations and his own pure-and-simple trade union movement. Gompers then decided to build a trade union international grouping distinct from the Socialist International <sup>4</sup>.

In 1894 the A. F. of L. president set out to win the active support of British trade unionists to this scheme. In that year and the next the Trades Union Congress and the Federation exchanged the first fraternal delegates to each others' conventions, and Gompers himself represented the A. F. of L. in Britain in 1895. Though the American delegates to the British unions suggested that a « bona fide [international] trade union congress » be convened on the initiative of the Trades Union Congress, they were unable to drum up enough enthusiasm to win English labor's support for the idea <sup>5</sup>.

Gompers' efforts to create an international grouping of trade unions led directly to his first overtures to the Trades and Labor Congress in Canada. « The A. F. of L. started the movement for an interchange of fraternal delegates between our Federation and the British Trade Union Congress, » Gompers explained to the A. F. of L. Executive Council in September, 1896. « The German Trade Union have selected a delegate

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<sup>3</sup> According to Eugene Forsey, the delegates from the Knights of Labor outnumbered those from international union locals in every year from 1886 through 1896, with the exception of 1892. Letter to the writer, May 29, 1969.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis L. LORWIN, *Labor and Internationalism*, New York, Macmillan, 1929, pp. 117-120.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

[to the Trades Union Congress]... I anticipate that we may have this interchange of fraternal delegates extended, and have been in correspondence with the executive officers of the Canadian Trade & Labor Congress, and am confident that a delegate will be elected by that body, which convenes this month.» Gompers hoped that the exchange of fraternal delegates among various national labor bodies would lead to the « holding of bona fide International Trade Congresses every few years. » <sup>6</sup>

#### THE ALIEN LABOR LAW AND DUES MONEY

The Trades and Labor Congress had reason to open communications with the A. F. of L. at this time. George Dower, the Congress secretary-treasurer, complained to Gompers about the American alien labor law. The law had been designed to ban the importation of labor under contract and was wholeheartedly supported by the Federation. Dower evidently felt that it hindered the movement of Canadians southward into the American job market. Although sympathetic to these complaints, Gompers pointed out both the necessity for excluding oriental labor from the United States, and the difficulty of designing legislation that would stop the influx of workingmen coming to the United States from other countries by way of Canada. While admitting the justice of Dower's position, he told the Canadians that he hoped the Trades Congress convention that year would not take any « ill-advised action » on the matter. « Were it not for the fact that I have an important engagement elsewhere at that time », Gompers added, « I should make it my business to be in attendance » <sup>7</sup>.

The Trades Congress was urged to select a fraternal delegate to attend the A.F. of L.'s December convention. Gompers, ever cautious, did not mention his proposed international trades congress to Dower. Instead he linked the alien labor law issue to his request : « I am sure that the selection of a fraternal delegate would help to the solution of this question and tend to establish more direct relations between the organized workers of the American Continent. More than likely », he concluded, « the interchange of fraternal delegates would then be made a permanent feature and would finally result in the attainment of the highest hopes entertained by earnest and thinking trade unionists » <sup>8</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Gompers to A. F. of L. Executive Council, September 8, 1896, in *Gompers Letterbooks*, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Hereafter abbreviated as *GL*.

<sup>7</sup> Gompers to Dower, August 26, 1896, *GL*. The letter also appears in the *Toronto Globe*, September 16, 1896, p. 2, and in the Trades and Labor Congress, *Proceedings*, 1896, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

Dower again brought up the alien labor question, but Gompers curtly dismissed the complaint, noting instead that the Canadian had made no reference to Gompers' invitation to send a fraternal delegate. « I do hope that this will be taken up by your Congress », he entreated, « and [as?] these reciprocal visitations of fraternal delegates tend to bind our fellow workers more closely together. This is certainly desirable ». Hinting at his larger purpose this time, he told Dower that the exchange would foster better understanding and a greater solidarity between wage workers of all countries. Failing to kindle any enthusiasm among the Canadians, Gompers sent blank credentials for the unnamed Canadian fraternal delegate and also passed on the names of the two prominent British delegates who were expected to attend the Federation meeting. The British delegation was feted at the A.F. of L. convention in the winter of 1896, but no Canadian delegate appeared. Though Gompers referred Dower's letters to a special committee on immigration, the committee's report made no reference to Canadian complaints about the alien labor law<sup>9</sup>.

It is not clear why the Trades Congress or its leaders failed to send a delegate. Three months before the A.F. of L. gathering, Gompers' first letter had been read into the minutes of the Trades and Labor Congress convention and had been referred to a special committee for consideration. The *Toronto Globe* had thought that the spirit, at least, of Gompers' views on the alien labor issue had been « admirable ». A Trades Congress committee had been less impressed, particularly about the call for an exchange of fraternal delegates. It had recommended that Congress leaders be instructed only « to consider the subject. . . in the said letters along such lines as may be deemed best to secure the end in view ». The Congress seemed vexed at Gompers' position on the alien labor issue. There may have been a question whether the Congress treasury could absorb the costs of sending a fraternal delegate. At the Trades Congress convention in 1897, the Canadian labor leaders took note of the Federation's inaction. They referred again to Gompers' desire to begin an annual exchange of fraternal delegates, but the convention decided it could not see its way clear to send a representative<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Gompers to Dower, September 3, November 12, 1896, *GL*; American Federation of Labor, *Proceedings*, 1896, p. 24, p. 53, pp. 81-82.

<sup>10</sup> *Toronto Globe*, September 17, 1896, p. 6; Trades and Labor Congress, *Proceedings*, 1896, p. 16, p. 29; *Proceedings*, 1897, p. 10.

A new and fundamental issue between the two labor groups, involving dues money, added to the Canadian convention's coolness toward the A.F. of L. A Vancouver printer had read the financial reports of the International Typographical Union and had noticed that a certain sum had been paid monthly to the A.F. of L. When Dower sent out a circular asking for contributions to keep a Congress legislative committee in Ottawa during the parliamentary session, the printer wrote back to suggest instead that the per capita paid by Canadian locals through their international unions to the A.F. of L. be turned over to the Trades Congress<sup>11</sup>. « While on the subject of the American Federation of Labor », Trades Congress leaders said in 1897, «... [we] believe that your Congress is entitled to some of the money paid to the Federation by Canadian members of International Unions ». They recommended that Canadian locals follow the Vancouver printer's suggestion. They agreed that it was unfair for the Federation to spend Canadian dues money on lobbying efforts in the halls of the United States Congress<sup>12</sup>.

#### A CANADIAN FEDERATION OF LABOR

The Canadian demand for a greater share of A.F. of L. per capita income arose amidst a loud clamor by some Canadian unionists for separation from Americans. An element within the Congress wanted to sever Canadian locals from their international union headquarters and reorganize the Trades Congress into a fully autonomous Canadian federation of labor. With power to charter unions, such an organization might very well drive the American craft unions out of Canada and might even threaten the A.F. of L. if the proposed « C.F. of L. » were determined to cross the boundary.

This movement for greater autonomy had begun in Canadian labor circles a few years earlier. In 1894 a Trades Congress committee composed in part of veteran Canadian labor leaders D. A. Carey, P. J. Jobin, and J. W. Patterson, went along with the notion that the Congress reconstitute itself into a Canadian federation with full power to issue charters and perform « such other duties as pertain to a national organ-

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<sup>11</sup> The episode is recounted in a letter from Frank Morrison, A. F. of L. secretary, to Ralph V. Brandt, June 11, 1907, in *Morrison Letterbooks*, AFL-CIO Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>12</sup> Trades and Labor Congress, Proceedings, 1897, p. 10. By 1897 the A. F. of L.'s lobbying expenses, while only about \$420, had risen about seven times above the year before. See Morrison to Brandt, June 11, 1907, in *Morrison Letterbooks*.

ization »<sup>13</sup>. Subsequently Jobin was elected president of the Trades Congress. However, in his address to the convention a year later, Jobin indicated something less than enthusiasm for the moves toward autonomy. «... In dealing with this question of a Canadian Labor Federation », he declared,

remember, fellow-delegates, that to reach its maximum efficacy organization of labor must be universal. If means are devised whereby, without antagonizing any of the existing international bodies, it would be possible to consolidate the efforts of the toilers of our Dominion, I believe that the means already exist in and through the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada<sup>14</sup>.

Jobin's words reflected some hesitation on the part of Trades Congress leaders to rush down the road to autonomy. They had been unable to discuss the matter together before the Congress convened in 1895, and therefore decided to return the question to the delegates with the « sincere hope » that something be done to accomplish the organization of Canadian workers. Still, they suggested that the Congress keep the same name, but assume the power to charter locals in Canada in trades without international or national charters<sup>15</sup>.

If the Trades Congress officers followed this procedure and granted priority to the international unions already in the field, the charter of such « federal labor unions » would not necessarily constitute a direct threat to international union jurisdictions. But the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council urged the Congress to go one step further and begin chartering city central labor bodies in Canada. The A.F. of L. had assumed this power, but had not yet exercised it in Canada. The delegates decided to set up a special committee to consider these recommendations and other changes to the Trades Congress constitution. A committee endorsed the proposals submitted by the Congress officers, and also urged adoption of the appellation « Canadian Federation of Labor ». While the new name indicated the desire of the committee to create an organization that would eventually become fully autonomous, the men also agreed with the Congress officers' view that the « C. F. of L. » should respect international union jurisdictions in Canada for the time being<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Trades and Labor Congress, *Proceedings*, 1894, p. 20.

<sup>14</sup> Trades and Labor Congress, *Proceedings*, 1895, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6, p. 10.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12, pp. 19-20.



Delegates to the convention of 1895 granted chartering powers to their officers, though refusing at the same time to change the name of the Congress to the « C. F. of L. » More controversial to supporters of the A. F. of L. brand of international unionism that year was an amendment to the Congress constitution which admitted representatives of the Socialist Labor party to the Congress. The pure-and-simple unionists counterattacked, losing their motion to bar the socialists by a close vote. Because the A. F. of L. still refused to bestow recognition on groups other than trade unionists, the Trades and Labor Congress appeared to be choosing a path at some variance from that followed by the Federation. More conservative elements, however, managed to recapture the Congress in 1896. The socialists were thrown out, while the Congress decided to retain its power to grant trade-union charters. The issue of autonomy was still unsettled <sup>17</sup>.

At the convention held in September, 1897, the running debate over the future of the Trades and Labor Congress broke wide open. Delegate R. G. Hay, representing the Ottawa Allied Trades and Labor Association, reopened it by introducing a motion to change the Trades Congress into a federation of Labor. Again the arguments of previous years were repeated, and again the future of trade unionism in Canada seemed at stake. But the new issue concerning the per capita tax payments made the discussions doubly fateful in 1897. If a large number of Canadian locals were sufficiently provoked by the financial issue to withdraw from the international unions, throw in their lot with the Canadian autonomists, and transfer their allegiance to a fully autonomous Canadian federation of labor, international trade unionism in North America was probably doomed <sup>18</sup>.

When a committee reported adversely on Hay's motion for autonomy, he rose to defend his proposal <sup>19</sup> The time had come, he said, when the labor organizations of Canada should be nationalized. It was inconsistent for labor men who believed the national flag should be flown over public schools to advocate the superiority of international

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20 ; *Proceedings*, 1896, p. 25 ; *Toronto Globe*, September 16, 1896, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Trades and Labor Congress, *Proceedings*, 1897, p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> This paragraph and the next two are based upon the account given in the *Toronto Globe*, September 16, 1897, p. 1.

unions over national ones. Delegate T. H. Fitzpatrick of the Toronto Typos, the resolution's seconder, believed that many Canadian workers refused to join unions because they knew their dues money would go to the United States. He saw no reason why Canadians should not have a labor association based upon the same principles as the American Federation of Labor. He did not think it vital that the Trades Congress change its name, but he thought it necessary for some labor body to issue charters and supplies to the unorganized in Canada.

Several delegates jumped up from their seats to defend international unionism. John Flett of the Hamilton Carpenters tried to dispel the notion that Canadians received nothing in return for their per capita tax contribution. He pointed to a specific case involving a carpenters' local in his city. It had received \$1,200 from the union headquarters during a strike years before — an amount more than it would be able to pay back for years. While Flett thought that national limits to the labor movement were unwise, he suggested that it would be « much better » if the Canadian Congress received its « just proportion » of per capita taxes for its own legislative needs. William Keys of the Montreal Knights of Labor local assembly argued that the Canadians could not afford an organization similar to the A. F. of L. Fred Walters of the Hamilton Moulders followed Flett's tack. As treasurer of his local, he had received no less than \$19,000 to support a strike of Canadian moulders. « The [Canadian] iron moulders have received \$3 for every \$1 they have sent away ». Walters agreed with Flett that the per capita tax paid by Canadians to the A. F. of L. should be handed over to the Trades Congress. Edward Williams of the Hamilton Trades and Labor Council conceded the importance of cultivating national sentiments. Nevertheless, years ago «... in the largest strike of railway men known in Canada, the strikers would have been utterly helpless had it not been for the connection with and support of the organization on the other side ».

The supporters of international unionism no doubt convinced some of their fellow delegates though at least one man was even dissuaded by them. It appeared, R. Keys of the Montreal Trades and Labor Council said, that the country could not get along without the United States for twenty-four hours. « It was galling to him at a Canadian to hear these remarks... », the *Globe* reported him as saying, and he was going to vote for autonomy. Although several autonomists tried to reassure their brethren that they were not really opposed to « internationalism », the motion for a C. F. of L. went down to defeat.

The supporters of international unionism in Canada were victorious, yet the problems that had provoked the debate still remained unresolved. The movement for greater autonomy was providing highly significant back-ground to the demand first raised by the Canadians in 1896 for a share in the revenue paid by them to the American Federation of Labor. It was becoming increasingly apparent that a large number of Canadian toilers, organized into locals of international craft unions with headquarters in the United States, paid dues to essentially American organizations. A part of their contribution was forwarded to the A. F. of L. and used for legislative purposes in the United States. Furthermore, Canadians thought that the American alien labor law threatened the free movement of Canadian craftsmen into American jobs and thereby nullified an important advantage possessed by Canadian holders of international union cards over other American immigrant streams. At the same time, growing numbers of Canadian industrial workers, whose jobs were the product of the early phases of a tremendous boom in the Canadian economy, needed to be organized into trade unions in order to protect wages and working conditions. Where was the money to come from? In the past Canadian toilers had been dependent upon occasional visits from the full-time organizers maintained by each international union, as well as upon the voluntary efforts of local unionists who labored nights and Sundays to organize the unorganized<sup>20</sup>. Charters had been obtained from the Federation or international union headquarters in the United States. As business conditions brightened in 1896 and 1897, Canadian trade-union leaders, aware of the growing number of unorganized industrial workers in their midst, endorsed the assumption of chartering powers by the Trades Congress. Lacking funds, though, they hoped that the A. F. of L. would assist them to organize Canadian workers into trade unions<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Just how infrequently these visits from international union heads were undertaken was indicated by a printer after president James Lynch of the International Typographical Union visited French Canada. «This is the first time in thirty years that an International officer has visited Quebec. If future visits will be as big with results as in the visited instance, we hope that they will be more frequent». *Typographical Journal*, vol. 18, February 15, 1901, p. 166.

<sup>21</sup> See the statement made by the committee on the president's address and executive committee reports, in Trades and Labor Congress, *Proceedings*, 1897, pp. 21-22.

## GOMPERS' FIRST CANADIAN ORGANIZER

The Canadians had reason to be optimistic in the fall of 1896. More by accident than design the Federation president had just appointed the A. F. of L.'s first general organizer for Canada. A Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, merchant, P. J. Loughrin, had told Gompers of his interest in the labor movement, and had asked him for an organizer's commission. Evidently the Canadian's earnestness had overcome Gompers' doubts about the wisdom of commissioning a businessman. He dispatched the desired document and inadvertently authorized Loughrin to act throughout the whole Dominion on behalf of the Federation<sup>22</sup>.

The new representative set up a federal labor union in his hometown, and secured an agreement whereby city authorities promised to employ only union men. Loughrin began filling Gompers' head with his plans and promises, some of which spilled over into politics and brought about a clash with the Federation president. Loughrin's brother had been campaigning in the Liberal interest for a seat in the Ontario legislature, and Gompers heard allegations that the Canadian, using his authority as an organizer, was compelling every union member to vote for his brother «or cease to belong to the union». Although Gompers questioned Loughrin's intervention in the election, he apparently was pleased at the outcome. He wrote Loughrin that he hoped the new legislator would be «in a position to render some good service to our cause»<sup>23</sup>.

It was not long before Loughrin was in hot water again. Early in 1897 Gompers began laying plans for an extensive speaking and organizing trip across North America. He asked Loughrin to correspond with union officials in several Canada towns in order to set up a ten-day Canadian leg of the trip. Loughrin appeared to stall, offering a variety of excuses. According to him the Trades Congress leaders were «fakes who wanted to rule Canada». He asked Gompers to call these men into line, and promised the Federation leaders that he would «reunite the country» if Gompers would «stand by» him. As the date of departure approached, Gompers grew impatient. After Loughrin mysteriously asked the A. F. of L. president to hold «them» until a signal was given, Gompers, thoroughly perplexed, wrote back that he did not understand what Loughrin was

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<sup>22</sup> Gompers to Loughrin, September 21, November 2, 1896, February 16, 1897, *GL*.

<sup>23</sup> American Federation of Labor, *Proceedings*, 1896, p. 30; Gompers to Loughrin, November 19, 1896, January 29, 1897, *GL*.

talking about. When Loughrin still failed to act. Gompers was forced to cancel the Canadian speaking dates <sup>24</sup>.

Loughrin left Sault Ste. Marie for Toronto, telling the press that he himself was making a month-long Canadian tour « in the interests of labor generally ». However, at labor gatherings he did not talk much about the usual trade union organizing details, but stressed the harm being done to Canadians by American investors in Dominion forests and mines. Loughrin also circulated a manifesto to boards of trade and municipal councils in which he called for an export tariff on pulpwood and an alien labor law to match the American statute. « It can be readily seen », he told a reporter, « that the pulpwood resources of the United States must, at an early date, succumb to the enormous consumption. . . , and it is just a matter of a few years till we are able to dictate terms to the world for pulp and paper as well as nickel ». Both the Toronto mayor and the president of the board of trade signed Loughrin's petition <sup>25</sup>.

Within a short time Gompers obtained a copy of Loughrin's petition and the newspaper interview, and showed the evidence to the Executive Council. « It appears », Gompers later told Loughrin, « that you are not only using that commission for business purposes but to estrange the workingmen of the Dominion of Canada and the United States ». The A. F. of L. leader summarily revoked Loughrin's commission. The Canadian had failed to observe that American business and labor interests were intertwined <sup>26</sup>.

Loughrin's subsequent action highlighted the precarious state of American unions in Canada at this time. He communicated with Trades Congress leaders in Toronto and offered to affiliate some 500 men engaged in the lumber industry on the north shore of Lake Superior. Then Loughrin's local in Sault Ste. Marie told Congress officers that they intended to withdraw from the A. F. of L., and asked for information regarding affiliation with the Congress. Obviously the Trades Congress, having assumed power to issue charters, was becoming an alternate organizing center for Canadian toilers. Although both schemes ultimately miscarried, Trades Congress leaders — too impoverished to dispatch an organizer of their own — became more conscious of the opportunities

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<sup>24</sup> Gompers to Loughrin, February 18, March 1, March 17, April 8, April 12, April 13, 1897, *GL*.

<sup>25</sup> Toronto *Globe*, April 13, 1897, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Gompers to Loughrin, May 1, 1897, *GL*.

for growth that were slipping through their fingers. Some thought that money was the nub of the problem. Others still felt that the Congress needed to reorganize itself into an autonomous labor body in order to meet the new conditions<sup>27</sup>.

The need for organization work was a prime topic at the Trades Congress convention in 1897. The delegates were warned that it would be expensive. It was estimated to cost about two hundred dollars to obtain charters and other printed matter, necessitating some arrangement until dues from new unionists covered expenses. The crucial need for revenue was also revealed after resolutions were introduced from the floor calling for the appointment of a salaried organizer. The committee on officers' reports told the delegates that they could find no way to cover the estimated costs of such a position. Reluctantly, they handed down an unfavorable decision. After concluding that « the salary and expenses of such an official would involve an outlay of five or six times the annual income of this Congress », the committee urged that action be deferred until an appeal had been made to the A. F. of L. concerning the Trades Congress's legislative expenses. They apparently calculated that more money would be available for organizing work if the burden of lobbying expenses was lightened. Surprisingly, the Congress refused to take the first step toward securing A. F. of L. support by sending a fraternal delegate to the Federation convention of late 1897. Some doubtless realized that such a move would forfeit any further steps toward greater autonomy for the Trades Congress<sup>28</sup>.

#### KIDD'S MISSION TO CANADA

Gompers had not dispaired of creating an international trades congress through the exchange of fraternal delegates. « Our efforts and our hopes should not be circumscribed by Cities, States, or geographical divisions of our country », he told the A. F. of L. delegates at their convention in 1897. « Our aim should be to unite the workers of our continent and to strive to attain the unity, solidarity, and fraternity of the workers of the world ». P. J. McGuire, a friend of Gompers and president of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters, urged that the A. F. of L. take the initiative to «... more closely cement the interests of the Trades Unions of

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<sup>27</sup> Trades and Labor Congress, *Proceedings*, 1897, p. 9; *Toronto Globe* September 14, 1897, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Trades and Labor Congress, *Proceedings*, 1897, p. 9; pp. 21-22.

America ». He moved to send an A. F. of L. fraternal delegate to the next convention of the Trades Congress. McGuire was well aware of the financial issue that had arisen a few months before. A number of unions in Canada paid per capita tax to international unions in the United States, he said, and « as we send delegates to England we should also send one to Canada ». The motion was adopted and the convention unanimously elected Thomas I. Kidd of the Woodworkers to become the A. F. of L.'s first fraternal delegate to the Trades Congress. Meeting separately, the Federation Executive Council authorized Gompers to seek an adjustment with the Canadians <sup>29</sup>.

In late April of 1898, a few days after President McKinley had asked Congress for a declaration of war against Spain, Gompers told the Executive Council that the Canadians were ready to bargain.. « Secretary George W. Dower states that if the sum of \$100.00 was set aside each year by the A. F. of L. to aid their legislative committee, the arrangement would be satisfactory and appease any dissatisfaction which may exist among the labor organizations of Canada ». Gompers proposed that the A. F. of L. make the annual grant to the Congress, and asked the Council members to vote on it <sup>30</sup>.

At the same time several Canadian locals were generating considerable pressure on the officers of some of the international unions for an adjustment of the dues issue. In St. Thomas, Ontario, a local of the Journeymen Tailors took the ultimate step that international union officers feared. It seceded from the international union in February, 1898, and became Local No. 1 of the Journeymen Tailors' Union of Canada. The Canadian tailors complained that too much money flowed across the border into American coffers, and that the American alien labor law had voided the advantages of membership in an international trade union. They began spreading their views across Canada in a circular letter to other tailors' locals <sup>31</sup>.

It is not surprising, then, that the A. F. of L. Executive Council moved quickly to approve the \$100 grant to the Trades and Labor

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<sup>29</sup> American Federation of Labor, *Proceedings*, 1897, p. 17, p. 64, p. 95, p. 106.

<sup>30</sup> Gompers to Executive Council, April 29, 1898, *GL*.

<sup>31</sup> Eugene Forsey, « The International Unions, 1881-1902 », a manuscript chapter in his forthcoming study of Canadian labor in the 19th century. The local returned to the Journeymen Tailors' Union of America in May, 1899.

Congress. Gompers explained to Dower that the appropriation would require the perannual endorsement of the A. F. of L. convention, but he expressed no doubt of its approval. « I am sure I express the hope of organized labor of our Continent », he said, « when I say that it is our earnest wish that the movement of America may be more solidified as the time goes on, and that our most sanguine expectations of success may be surpassed ». It was a typical rendering of Gompers' rather diffuse sentiments <sup>32</sup>.

#### THE A. F. OF L. — T. L. C. FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENT

The A. F. of L.'s grant was offered at a time of triumphant American expansion into the Caribbean. The victory of American arms over Spain cast a bright, warm glow over all English-speaking North Americans, and the Canadians effused good feelings for their brethren across the line. The Trades Congress gathered at Winnipeg in September, 1898, in an atmosphere which foreshadowed the future course of Canadian-American labor relations. At a banquet tendered by city hall officials, the A. F. of L. was toasted while a brass band played « Yankee Doodle » and « For They Are Jolly Good Fellows ». Several speakers, including a Winnipeg alderman, lauded the American nation. Kidd's response suggested the way in which those heady days of imperial expansion were subtly influencing the nature of American labor's internationalism. Steps were being taken, Kidd asserted, to secure the harmonious working of the labor organizations of the United States, Canada, and Mexico. He believed that « . . . the *safety* of the United States, of Canada, and other countries depended upon the organization of wage workers. . . » <sup>33</sup> Federation leaders were joining the ranks of industrialists and politicians who felt that American power depended upon achieving pre-eminence within the entire Western hemisphere. Gompers had found himself unable to counteract the influence of socialists in the European labor movement, but he could strengthen his own grip upon organized labor in Canada.

The executive committee of the Trades Congress (president David Carey and secretary-treasurer George Dower) met with Kidd and

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<sup>32</sup> Gompers to Dower, May 24, 1898, *GL*. The Executive Council unanimously supported the grant, according to Philip Taft, who has examined its minutes. See « Differences in the Executive Council of the American Federation of Labor », *Labor History*, vol. 5, Winter, 1964, p. 44.

<sup>33</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, September 19, 1898, p. 2 (Emphasis added).



discussed the A. F. of L.'s grant at considerable length. Kidd promised the Canadians that if they would dispatch to the A. F. of L. convention a petition requesting the legislative grant, he would endorse the aims and objects of the Trades and Labor Congress in his report to the A. F. of L. delegates, who were meeting in Kansas City later that year. Afterwards, in their report to the Trades Congress delegates, the two Canadians strongly recommended that the Congress not only follow Kidd's suggestions, but also send its own fraternal delegate to the coming Federation convention. Immediately following this proposal, a platform committee moved to assist Kidd's defense of Trades Congress aims. It reported on a thirteen-point draft statement of Congress objectives. The document went a long way to reassure conservative international union officers that the Trades Congress was a safe « investment », and that the Canadian trade-union national center had not been infected by socialistic measures aimed at the total transformation of the industrial community. The Canadians adopted the platform and proceeded to elect their president, David Carey, to be the first fraternal delegate to the A. F. of L.<sup>34</sup>

At the Federation convention in Kansas City in late 1898, Kidd carefully compared the functions of the A. F. of L. with those of the Trades and Labor Congress. They were radically different bodies, he said, because the Canadian group was not concerned with jurisdictional disputes between international unions. The Trades Congress was designed to secure beneficial legislation and organize workers wherever they were able. However, the two organizations might very well become enemies, he implied.

It would be unwise to deny or ignore the fact that a feeling of antagonism obtains among many of the active workers in Canadian

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<sup>34</sup> Trades and Labor Congress, *Proceedings*, 1898, p. 17, pp. 30-31; *Manitoba Free Press*, September 21, 1898, p. 3. The Congress platform, amended to include 15 planks, called for 1) free public education, 2) an eight-hour day, six day week, 3) government inspection of industries, 4) an end to contract labor on public works, 5) a minimum « living » wage, 6) public ownership of railways, telegraphs, waterworks, lighting, etc., 7) tax reform, 8) abolition of the Canadian Senate, 9) exclusion of Chinese, 10) the union label, 11) abolition of child labor, and « female labor in all branches of industrial life... », 12) abolition of property qualifications for public office, 13) compulsory arbitration of labor disputes, 14) **proportional representation**, 15) a ban on prison labor competing with free labor. Some of the planks were nearly identical to a platform adopted by the A. F. of L. in 1894; only the compulsory arbitration measure might have aroused Gomper's ire, and that plank was revised in accordance with his wishes at the Berlin session in 1902.

labor circles toward the American Federation of Labor. Many believe that it is unfair for the International unions with which they are connected to pay a per capita tax to the Federation on their account, which they claim goes towards the support of a lobby in Washington.

To the Canadians, Kidd explained, the Federation appeared to be purely an American group unconcerned with labor legislation beyond American boundaries, while the Trades Congress was essential to Canadians who lived under different institutions and dissimilar laws. Only a powerful Trades Congress could influence Canadian law-making bodies. « As nearly all the unions affiliated with the Labor Congress are likewise affiliated with the A. F. of L. », Kidd asserted with considerable exaggeration, « the former thinks the Federation should aid it in trying to secure remedial legislation »<sup>35</sup>.

Kidd told the delegates of his meetings with the Trades Congress executive committee. He noted their desire to receive A. F. of L. assistance in organizing Canadian workers. « There can be no question », he concluded, « about the wisdom of your last Convention electing a fraternal delegate to Canada. Many small misunderstandings were easily explained away, and, by continuing to send fraternal delegates, misunderstandings of the same kind will, in the near future, cease to exist ». Later, the convention delegates, a bit confused, endorsed the \$100 grant « in the matter of organization in Canada » (the Executive Council had considered it to be a grant for legislative purposes)<sup>36</sup>. In effect this money shattered the dreams of those who wanted to create a Canadian federation of labor, and paved the way for the absorption of the Trades Congress into the Federation in 1902.

## CONCLUSION

By the end of 1898 the Trades and Labor Congress had embarked upon a new course. It had been organized originally to represent the legislative interests of Canadian trade unionists, some of whom were members of international craft unions with American headquarters. In 1881 these American crafts had banded together under one banner designed to wave over the North American continent. Despite this, neither national labor center defined its relationship to the other. When Gompers decided to organize an international federation of labor, he turned his

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<sup>35</sup> American Federation of Labor, *Proceedings*, 1898, pp. 60-61.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62. p. 94.

attention towards Canadian unions for the first time. Meanwhile some Canadian unionists realized they were paying a portion of Federation expenses without deriving any benefits, and they resented it. Uncertainty over the effect of the American alien labor law, combined with the desire of many Canadian labor leaders to begin an organizing campaign among the new industrial workers in Dominion towns and cities, led several Canadian unionists to advocate an autonomous labor structure. But the Trades and Labor Congress was not able to expand its activities without additional income. A « C. F. of L. » was never launched and Congress leaders, apparently supported by most of the rank and file, finally agreed to exchange fraternal delegates with the Federation. In return, the Canadians asked for and received an annual grant from the A. F. of L. for « legislative » purposes in lieu of the per capita contributions made by Canadian toilers through their international unions to the A. F. of L. In 1898 this grant represented about twenty per cent of Congress income.

After 1898, there was little to stop Gompers' assertions of authority over Canadian trade-union affairs. The Federation went on to buttress its position in Canada, raising its grant to \$200 in 1901, \$300 in 1902, and \$500 after the Berlin decisions. Gompers appointed another full-time organizer (John Flett) to succeed Loughrin and launched an organizing campaign in 1900 of continental scope. Canadian unionists seemed to appreciate the economic benefits gained through their ties with the A. F. of L. and the international crafts, and were perhaps less aware or concerned that the Trades and Labor Congress was being reduced to the equivalent of an American state federation of labor. Clearly, the Berlin decisions of 1902, whereby Canadians relinquished control over their trade union movement, were foreshadowed by the end of 1898.

### **Samuel Gompers et l'expansion de la FAT au Canada (1882-1898)**

Bien que des mouvements syndicaux nationaux se soient développés aux États-Unis et au Canada au cours des années 1880 et que la Fédération américaine du travail ait prétendu avoir compétence sur tout le continent, celle-ci et le Congrès des métiers et du travail furent des années sans avoir de contacts. Gompers ignorait à peu près complètement les travailleurs canadiens jusqu'à ce que son projet de former un rassemblement international de syndicats ait été torpillé par les socialistes d'Europe. Cette tentative n'est pas indifférente aux circonstances qui entourèrent l'intérêt croissant de Gompers pour le Canada à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle.

Gompers arrangea un échange de délégués fraternels avec les Anglais et les Canadiens en vue de mettre sur pied une nouvelle fraternité syndicale inter-

nationale formée de syndicats de métiers. Au même moment, le Congrès des métiers et du travail, irrité d'une nouvelle loi des États-Unis touchant les travailleurs aubains, était désireux de soumettre ses doléances à Gompers. Le chef syndical américain les écouta avec sympathie et proposa de rechercher une solution par le moyen de l'échange de délégués fraternels. Le Congrès des métiers et du travail était indécis cependant, parce que bon nombre de syndiqués canadiens étaient marris d'avoir à payer des cotisations à une organisation ouvrière américaine dont les fonds servaient en partie à faire du *lobbying* politique à leur détriment.

Vers la même époque, quelques groupes, à l'intérieur du Congrès des métiers et du travail, réclamaient la formation d'une centrale syndicale canadienne autonome. En 1894, un comité du congrès proposa aux délégués de reconstituer le C.M.T. sous le nom de C.M.T.C. avec pleins pouvoirs d'émettre des chartes et de s'acquitter « de toute autre obligation dévolue à une organisation nationale ». L'année suivante, cependant, les Canadiens ne firent que la moitié du chemin dans la voie vers l'autonomie en accordant au conseil exécutif du Congrès le pouvoir d'émettre des chartes, mais en se gardant de changer le nom de l'organisme et laissant libre pour le moment le champ de compétence des unions internationales. Les syndicats socialistes furent admis dans les rangs du Congrès pour en être expulsés l'année suivante.

Le débat sur l'avenir du Congrès, animé par la controverse au sujet du paiement de capitations à la Fédération américaine du travail, rebondit avec une vigueur nouvelle en 1897. Le temps est arrivé déclara le délégué Hay en pleine séance du congrès, où les syndicats ouvriers canadiens doivent prendre un caractère national. Il est illogique pour des travailleurs qui estiment que le drapeau national doit flotter au toit des écoles publiques de reconnaître la suprématie des syndicats internationaux sur les syndicats nationaux. D'autres délégués se portèrent à la défense des syndicats internationaux en mettant de l'avant des cas précis où ceux-ci avaient fourni des fonds pour appuyer des grèves de leurs sections locales au Canada. Les votes de ces derniers suffirent à faire battre les partisans d'une « fédération canadienne du travail », mais les problèmes fondamentaux qu'affrontait le Congrès des métiers et du travail demeuraient sans solution. Les chefs ouvriers canadiens ne savaient pas trop où s'adresser pour obtenir l'argent nécessaire pour stimuler l'organisation et faire face aux autres activités syndicales.

Lorsque Gompers engagea P. J. Loughrin, de Sault Ste-Marie, pour entreprendre une campagne d'organisation, il sembla pendant un certain temps que la Fédération américaine du travail allait se porter à l'aide des Canadiens. Mais Loughrin fit faux bond et se lança dans une campagne contre les investissements américains dans les ressources naturelles du Canada. Il fut aussitôt congédié pour ce motif par la Fédération américaine du travail. Lorsque, par la suite, il tenta de passer au Congrès, celui-ci s'avéra trop faible pour prêter une main secourable aux tâches immenses d'organisation. N'ayant pas reçu de nouvelles des Canadiens au sujet de l'échange de délégués fraternels, Gompers décida, à la fin de 1897, d'envoyer quelqu'un de la Fédération américaine du travail, en l'occurrence Thomas Kidd, à la session suivante du Congrès des métiers et du travail. Cependant, avant la réunion, le secrétaire du Congrès, George Dower, s'entendit avec Gompers sur le versement d'un octroi annuel de cent dollars en retour de la part des cotisations des syndiqués canadiens aux syndicats internationaux qui était dépensée à des fins

de *lobbying* politique aux États-Unis. Kidd vint au Canada dans l'intention de convaincre les Canadiens de la sagesse de la proposition de Dower. Les délégués au congrès facilitèrent l'alliance FAT-CMT en affirmant de façon explicite dans une déclaration de principes que le Congrès des métiers et du travail n'avait pas l'intention de s'allier aux adversaires socialistes de Gompers. L'accord fut proclamé au milieu des célébrations qui marquaient la victoire des armes américaines sur l'Espagne. Ainsi, Gompers, qui avait été impuissant à neutraliser l'influence des socialistes européens, avait au moins resserré son emprise sur les travailleurs canadiens.

Évidemment, à la fin de 1898, on pouvait déjà prévoir les décisions du congrès de Berlin (Kitchener) en 1902. Rien ne s'opposa plus à l'affermissement de l'autorité de Gompers sur les affaires syndicales au Canada. La Fédération américaine du travail porta son octroi à deux cents dollars en 1901, à trois cents dollars en 1902 et il fut fixé à cinq cents dollars après les décisions du congrès de Berlin. Gompers nomma, pour succéder à Loughrin, un autre organisateur à temps plein (John Flett) qui mit en branle une campagne d'organisation d'un bout à l'autre du Canada. La grande majorité des syndiqués canadiens se réjouirent des avantages économiques immédiats qu'ils obtinrent par leur rattachement à la Fédération américaine du travail et aux syndicats de métiers internationaux. Mais ils étaient peut-être moins conscients, ou peut-être cela ne les intéressaient-ils pas, du fait que le Congrès des métiers et du travail se trouvait ainsi ramené au rang d'une fédération du travail d'État outre-frontière.

## LE SYNDICALISME CANADIEN (1968) une réévaluation

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